

U.S. Reps. Joseph Sestak, D-7, of Edgmont, and Rob Andrews, D-N.J., discussed a new analysis of the Federal Aviation Administration's controversial NY/NJ/PHL Airspace Redesign Plan Friday that indicates using "satellite" airports instead could better reduce delays at Philadelphia International Airport at far less cost.

According to the analysis performed by Rowan University at Andrews' request, the FAA's Record of Decision (ROD) for the airspace redesign shows flight delays at PHL average about 23 minutes.

But the FAA's own analysis of that plan shows average delays would only be reduced to between 19-20 minutes by 2011. Lengthening a runway at PHL under a Capacity Enhancement Program would also only reduce the delay by an additional 6 to 20 percent, according to the analysis, and cost an estimated \$840 million.

But the Rowan report, citing a study performed by Rutgers University, indicates diverting just 10 percent of PHL air operations to alternative "satellite" airports such as Atlantic City, N.J., or Wilmington, Del., could cut delays by 14 minutes in 2011, on average, and cost just \$1 million annually for increased personnel.

FAA spokesman Jim Peters, however, said the agency has no authority to tell commercial air carriers where to offer flights. Those decisions are at the sole discretion of the carrier, he said, and are driven by market-demand factors.

There is a program administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation that provides subsidies to encourage carriers to offer service at smaller airports, said Peters, but again, that has nothing to do with the FAA.

Sestak and Andrews are expected to present the alternative data to recently appointed Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood within the next few days, as well as a new FAA administrator who has not yet been named.

Meanwhile, Sestak sent a letter to Delaware County Council Chairman Linda Cartisano encouraging that council support not just the regional airport model but also stand with Tinicum Township in preventing Philadelphia from purchasing land for the Capacity Enhancement Program.

“If Tinicum Township prevents the sale of that land, the capacity increase expected by the FAA’s plan will be blocked,” said Sestak in the letter. “In short, the land must not be sold.”

He also urged council to pursue an injunction against the city for failing to comply with its own Noise Compatibility Program, adopted in 2003.

The program is voluntary, said Sestak, but once entered into must be adhered to. It requires aircraft leaving PHL to follow the Delaware River until they reach an altitude of 3,000 feet, which means PHL has been in violation of the program for up to 16 hours every day since the airspace redesign was partially implemented in 2007, according to Sestak.

In the letter, he urges Cartisano to join with local municipalities that relied upon the program’s parameters in adopting zoning regulations to seek a state court injunction requiring PHL to enforce the program “commencing immediately and continuing indefinitely.”

Delaware County and numerous other entities also have a consolidated suit pending in the Washington, D.C., Circuit Court to halt the redesign plan, oral arguments for which are scheduled May 11. U.S. Reps. Joseph Sestak, D-7, of Edgmont, and Rob Andrews, D-N.J., discussed a new analysis of the Federal Aviation Administration’s controversial NY/NJ/PHL Airspace Redesign Plan Friday that indicates using “satellite” airports instead could better reduce delays at Philadelphia International Airport at far less cost.

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